

Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on some very important issues for Connecticut. I am Professor Louise Simmons, a professor of Social Work and one of the areas I have been involved with academically is the set of issues faced by low wage workers. I also am Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Center for a New Economy, an organization that organizes and advocates on behalf of working families in terms of their needs in the labor market, as health care consumers, as residents in their communities and as participants in public issues.

I speak in favor of two bills before you today, Senate Bill 352, an Act Creating a Process for Family Child Care Providers to Collectively Bargain with the State and House Bill 5433 An Act Creating a Procedure for Personal Care Attendants to Collectively Bargain with the State. These bills accomplish several things simultaneously that both improve services to working families and to those in home care, and that provide a way for low paying insecure jobs to become more family supporting jobs for those who fill them.

Both areas of work, personal care and child care are very important jobs that affect the quality of life in our communities, for the very young and those at the other end of the age spectrum, as well as many individuals at all ages. Yet this work is largely undervalued, often relegated to part-time status, paying poverty-level wages, lacking in benefits and high in turnover. These jobs are often held by women and these women workers, in the case of Care4Kids childcare providers, make it possible for other women to work. And, with the growth of our senior population, personal care attendants allow these individuals to remain in their homes and live in comfortable, familiar surroundings as long as possible and avoid costly institutional care.

These groups of workers have little control over their working lives and turnover in these areas is high. Demand increases for these services, but the supply of workers does not keep up with demand due to the precarious nature of the work. However, there are ways to address their concerns, provide better and more consistent care and other states have taken the lead in establishing home care commissions, and allowing collective bargaining for these workers, as proposed in HB 5433. Empowering family child care providers by allowing them to form organizations in which they can determine priorities and bargain over wages, as proposed in SB 352, will also serve to improve the quality of child care they provide.

As we hear more and more about the stunning inequality in Connecticut and the nation, one way that those at the bottom of the economic ladder have to improve their situation is the right to collectively bargain over the working conditions. Our cities, and particularly Hartford where I live, desperately need to find ways to lift incomes. These are hard-working individuals who deserve to be rewarded for the important jobs they perform. By voting favorably on these two pieces of legislation you will be taking steps in a positive direction for these workers and those they serve.

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